

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMUNITY

613 ten pounds; otherwise the 'Amareen have to pay the sum of ten pounds.
627 The payment of money actually takes place, but it is always given back to the payer as 'Arab-coffee' and there is no appeal beyond this stage.

623 The Arab council is the traditional agent for maintaining law and
627 order in the village, and its composition and functioning reflect the traditional concept of authority. Prestige derived from age, experience, and sobriety combined with power attached to landowners and heads of large families who are well known for their hospitality, are the main qualifications for selection in these councils. Although these principles are not rigidly adhered to in the village itself, they are more observed in composing a council to arbitrate in a dispute in another village. Like Chan Kom, Silwa conceives of a hierarchy of power and responsibility. As in Tepoztlan, government is ideally a fatherly discharge of responsibility by the powerful and able to give benefit to all, but with lesser men taking lesser places.¹ These Arab councils vary in their composition according to the gravity of the issue. They are formed frequently and spontaneously to settle disputes, but their proceedings are almost uniform.

627 Women have similar gatherings for settling feminine disputes, but they are less formal and lack that atmosphere of solemnity that prevails in men's councils. Men's councils, however, could be convoked to settle women's conflicts creating disruption between two houses, and men are expected to plead the case of the women concerned and undertake the responsibility of making them abide by the council's decision.

In the arguments that take place in these councils, one can hardly fail to notice the importance of the mediators appealing to the kinship idioms to minimize the insult or the loss, or the accusers to exaggerate the offence. 'If my cousins, or brothers do so and so, how would others treat me? . . .'

623 It is also worth noticing that these Arab councils are held irrespective of
627 civil law procedures. In the case of attack on somebody, or damage to fields
692 or animals, the Arab council has to be formed to smooth the relations between the disputants. The norms and procedures of Arab councils are accepted by common consent as the basis of law and order as distinct from legalistic ways. To appeal to a remote and impersonal power vested in the local or national government is not a socially acceptable procedure, as any dispute should first be discussed by the people involved as well as those who mediate between them. My informant, Ali, regretted the fact that people do not nowadays accept reconciliation according to Arab council verdict, as they used to do; and much recourse is made to legal courts by 'brother against brother' and even father against son.

623 It is also evident that these Arab councils perform a very useful psycho-
627 logical function. By airing disputes, and transferring the offence from one
154 circle to another in the Arab council, aggression is dissipated and diffused.

In settling damages in Arab councils, the amount has to be fixed by the gathering, but it is shameful not to return the compensation (award) which should be decided by the council. ¹ Robert Redfield, *A Village and its Progress*, p. 163.

THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

far as I know, from private individuals. It is very different in England, where the hospitals for children and adults alike are supported by voluntary contributions. It is not that charity is lacking in Egypt—far from it; but for *organized* charity such as we have in England there is a crying need.

It is not altogether surprising, considering the state of ignorance in which they exist, that the mental outlook of most of the villagers is low. As far as the women are concerned, there is nothing to raise it. Sexual matters form the chief topic of their conversation, and this has a most degrading effect both on them and on their children, before whom they discuss the most private matters without the slightest reserve. Thus the children from their very early years hear subjects spoken of and joked about in a manner that is most revolting to educated people. What chance have the children in such circumstances of growing up into pure-minded men and women? I am told (for such conversation rarely takes place in my presence) that the women are far greater offenders in this respect than the men, who usually refrain from discussing their wives with outsiders. Whether this is true or not I am not in a position to say, but at any rate the children, and especially the girls, who are more constantly with their mothers than the boys, hear the most private sexual matters openly discussed, and in such a way as to poison their minds at the very outset of their lives. Marriage is, of course, the one and only aim in life among the girls, and the desire to get a husband is encouraged in every way by the mothers. It is quite a pitiful sight to see a little girl decked out in all the jewellery she can muster, dressed in a gaily coloured frock decorated with beads and jangles (Fig. 17), and with a veil drawn coquettishly across her face, standing about the village street, or outside the house, obviously on the look-out to attract some man. In all this they are aided and abetted by their mothers, who regard it as a compliment to themselves as well as to their daughters if the latter are sought after as wives at an early age. The Egyptian Government is endeavouring to prohibit the very early marriages which have been usual in the past, and there is now a law forbidding a girl to marry till she is sixteen and a boy till he is eighteen. However, in small, out-of-the-way villages the law has been disobeyed to my certain knowledge in more than one case. False ages were, I suppose, given to the *kādi*, as the man who draws up the marriage contracts is called; and he, in view of the fee he

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obtains for his business, probably refrained from examining the statement as to age made by the girl's parents.

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The childbearing age lasts over a long period, for girls mature

early, and it is a common thing in Egypt for a woman of fifty to give birth to a child. From an economic point of view it is probably an advantage that so many of the children die, for otherwise the country would soon become over-populated. What is so desirable is that those who do survive should be brought up in healthier surroundings, both moral and physical, and without the unnecessary suffering inflicted upon them by the ignorance of the mothers.

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FIG. 17. YOUNG GIRL DRESSED UP TO ATTRACT A HUSBAND

In spite of the frequently indecent talk on sexual matters, there is a strict moral code, especially with regard to unmarried girls, the infringement of which often entails a

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terrible punishment. This seems somewhat unfair on the girls, considering the atmosphere in which they are brought up. If a girl has misconducted herself before marriage, and is discovered at marriage to be unchaste, the disgrace to her family is looked upon as such a terrible one that her own parents will often kill her, sometimes taking the unfortunate child—for she is hardly more than a child—into the desert, and there dispatching her, usually, I

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over again. Finding that he got no better, his wife divorced him, whereupon the *kādi* asked for her in marriage, and was accepted. Meanwhile, the poor husband wandered aimlessly about, saying that he was king of his native village. He collected *būs*—dry *dura* (maize) stalks—each stalk of which he thought was a gun. With these he armed himself and the young lads of the village, and told them that he was their king, and that they must follow him to

fight against the other villages. On the day of the weekly market he would repair to the market-place, seize large pieces of meat hung up for sale, and eat them raw. He would also pounce upon the fish which the fishermen had caught in the pond adjoining the village. At last the *'omdeh*, or headman, of the village, finding that the poor fellow had become a disturbing element in the place, wrote to headquarters about him, and he was removed to an asylum. Here he died, but up to the last the one sensible word he was constantly uttering was his wife's name. The events recorded still form



FIG. 117. CHARM TO DRAW A MAN OR WOMAN FROM A DISTANCE

a common topic of conversation in the madman's native village.

I myself have seen the *kādi* who played such a prominent and cruel part in this bit of village history, and the poor madman's wife whom he married figures in the following account of how a woman can be drawn from a distance.

To bring a man or woman from a distance the magician proceeds as follows. He takes four branches of a pomegranate-tree and sticks them into the ground, tying them together at the top. He then makes a paper figure of a man or woman, and writes a charm on it (Fig. 117). The figure shown in the accompanying photograph was made and inscribed for me by the Coptic magician

The Ministry of Public Works controls the irrigation of ⁶⁵⁶ all cultivated land, settles the rotation of crops for each zone, watches over the embankments and canals, and, if the Nile threatens to break its banks, recruits the fellaheen necessary for their maintenance.

The Ministry of Agriculture regulates the acreage of cotton and rice, distributes and controls the selection of cotton seed, and levies the fellaheen needed to fight the boll worm or the locust.

The Ministry of Finance collects the land-tax through ⁶⁵¹ its *sarrafs* in each district, issues orders for seizures, buys ⁶⁵⁶ cotton to maintain equilibrium in the home market, and ⁶⁵⁷ by means of the *Crédit Agricole* attempts to systematise the finances of the fellah.

The Ministries of Education and Public Health oblige ⁸⁷¹ the fellah to improve his mind and his physique.

The Ministry of Justice, through the district courts, ⁶⁹² — and after a long delays — condemns or acquits him.

The Ministry of National Defence arranges for his en-⁷⁰² interest, or collects the exemption fine.

The Ministry of the Interior, acting in the common ⁶⁵⁶ interest, supports all this network of regulations and so ensures order and public security.

The Government system in its present form is less than ¹⁷⁵ a century old. It was established by Mohammed Aly, ⁶⁴ and has changed little in its working since. He did not so much create the machinery which deals with the fellah as systematise it after the disastrous and arbitrary rule of the Turks and Mamelukes. The founder of the reigning House thus raised over the heads of the fellaheen a system of law and order which makes it possible for them, if not to progress, at least to live.

Let us examine this hierarchy from top to bottom, and consider the relations of each authority with the fellah.

First of all comes the King. The last two sovereigns ⁶⁴³ (not to mention others) have sincerely desired the well-being ⁶⁴⁵ of the fellah, and frequently given proof of this desire. Their Ministers, however, are often more occupied with politics than with government, and travel far more in Europe than in the

643 country As in all modern Governments, they are always
 645 changing, and their efforts are nullified by their successors.
 Nevertheless, since government is extremely centralised,
 their signatures are needed for the merest details, which
 accounts for a great deal of delay. As they know the state of
 affairs only from official reports, their decisions in matters
 concerning the fellaheen are often either unsuitable or
 inopportune.

647 The authorities whose business it is to apply these de-
 692 cisions are legion. The transmission and execution of laws,
 orders, decrees, bye-laws and the like is carried out by an
 army of officials 200,000 strong, who for so doing absorb
 a third of the revenue of the State, a sum almost equal to
 what is furnished by the labours of the fellaheen.

647 This is no chance comparison of the author's. 'The
 511 long continuance of the bureaucratic system,' said Makram
 661 Ebeid Pasha, Minister of Finance, in presenting the budget
 for 1936 to Parliament, 'has been the chief cause of the
 lasting poverty of the fellah, in spite of the progress and pros-
 perity of the country.' He proposed, in his own words, to 'put
 an end to this shameful state of affairs, which has turned the
 people into mere servants of a government machine which
 was intended to serve them.'

647 The overpowering weight of this machine is concentrat-
 ed, for the fellah, in the hands of his *mudîr*, his *maamûr*,
 and his *omda*. Let us examine the scope and function of
 these different officials.

635 Politically, Egypt is divided into 23 sections. There
 are five urban areas, called governorates (*mohâfazat*). These
 are: Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, Suez and the Canal Area.
 There are four frontier-districts: the Red Sea, Sinai, the
 Western Desert (including the Oases of Siwa, Bahariya
 and Farafra) and the Southern Desert (including the Oases
 of Dakhla and Kharga). Last, but not least, there are 14
 agricultural provinces, called *mudiriya*s, which cover the
 rest of the country.

Six of these—Beheira, Gharbiya, Dakahliya, Sharqiya,
 Menoufiya and Qalioubiya—each with 300,000 to 900,000
 inhabitants, spread like a fan over the Delta. These six,
 whose names date from the Arab Period, are the most
 populous and best irrigated.

622 the post, by the law of 1895, unless he is owner of at least ten feddans. His appointment is usually preceded by rivalries which may turn into brawls, and followed by feuds that often end in death.

The *omda*, however, knows very well how to protect and even avenge himself, for he alone transmits information to the *maamûr*, and has sole charge of twenty or more night-watchmen (*ghaffirs*). Indeed, his chief duty is to ensure public security in the village and the surrounding country rather than to concern himself with improvements or with public health, to which he gives no more thought than those under him.

He represents his village district (*nahya*) before the *maamûr*, is responsible for any crimes committed in it which are reported, supports the *sarraf* in the business of tax-collecting, sees to the levy of men required for any given task, takes charge of the post and telephone, controls the carrying of arms, reports the outbreak of disease among people or cattle, and records births and deaths.

622 He is not paid by the Government, but apart from the
692 value of the prestige attaching to his office, he has various
624 privileges. He is exempt from taxation on five feddans, from forced labour, and from military service. This applies both to himself and to his sons. By custom, if not by right, the position of *omda* remains the privilege of one family. If the village is large and important, the *omda* is assisted by sheikhs, with whom he deliberates before giving his decisions. One of my pupils, the son of an *omda* in Upper Egypt, describes the procedure as follows: 'My father has 25 *ghaffirs* under his orders. From 5 p.m. to 5 a.m. they are on watch in the fields, with the exception of two who
622 remain on guard at the *omda's* house. If there is a trial,
692 it is conducted thus: The *omda* sits down in his *montaza*,
695 or outer garden, with a few sheikhs (men of some age and responsibility). The two disputants appear, and each gives his explanation of the matter. The *omda* gives his judgment, and tries to reconcile them. If they are not content to abide by his decision, he locks them up in jail until the following day and then sends them to the *markaz* with two *ghaffirs*.'

622 An *omda* may imprison for 24 hours, and impose a fine
692 up to 15 piastres. There is no town-hall in the village. The

3: Ayrout M-5 (ca. 1935) 1945

MR13 Fellahin MR13

'*omda*'s house takes its place. All day long he is receiving petitioners or travellers, unless he is going the rounds with some official or inspecting his own fields. He pays frequent visits to the chief town of the district, either for business or for pleasure. 622
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This uncontrolled system, though it has many advantages for the Government, is full of drawbacks for the fellah, abandoned as he is to a master who knows no more about administration than about justice. There are indeed exceptions, but they are as yet few. The system is also prejudicial to public security. Crimes may easily be concealed, or even foisted upon the innocent, by such an autocracy. Village feuds usually owe their origin and persistence to the rivalries aroused by this office. 692
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At Nahyet el Barūd, in the *markaz* of Abu Tig, a new '*omda*' was to be nominated. Among the candidates for the position two were outstanding, Sheikh Ahmed Abu Zeid and Sheikh Ahmed Farghali. One of these had been dismissed from the post by official action; the other, who had been *omda* in 1931, had also been dismissed by the Nessim Pasha Ministry. Both candidates were much feared in the district, and each had a large band of supporters. The committee which had to count the votes and then decide the election was formed of the *maamūr*, representatives of the neighbouring villages, and the *maazūn* of the village itself. However, the eligibility of the *maazūn*, as being a relative of one of the candidates, was challenged by the other. The authorities of the *markaz* then let it be known that the *maazūn* of another village would sit in his place. But on the day of the election, which was to be decided by a show of hands, it was seen that the first *maazūn* was still on the committee. His enemy's supporters objected, while his own friends upheld him, and the two parties came to blows. Worse than this, they made use of whatever weapons they could lay hands on, and a savage battle ensued. Before the police could intervene, three men had been killed and a number of others seriously wounded. The authorities arrested both candidates. The *mudīr* of Assiut gave orders that elections at Nahyet el Barūd and the neighbouring villages should be suspended until order was re-established (11th July, 1937). 622
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Towards his superiors, whether officials or landlords, the fellah adopts an attitude of awesome respect, of servility

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878

MR13 Fellahin MR13

Upper Egypt

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796 order to add life to an entertainment gentlemen often send
574 for singers, instrumentalists, and dancers, the last of whom
are generally in great request on the evenings of this month.
The religious element is represented by a schoolmaster who
recites the Koran in another room, and who is expressly
796 hired for the month, or an educated slave or a son may
[852] perform this office. Other feasts, such as circumcisions
[585] or marriages, are never celebrated in the sacred month.
[692] Sittings of the courts are commonly held and the more
important official business performed at night. It is not till
264 towards midnight that quietness prevails; the muezzin calls,
796 and soon after, a cry is heard and a warning shot sounds over
[202] the town intimating that it is time to prepare for the last
meal. If any person has failed to notice this he is warned
by individuals who about this time wander singly through
the town from house to house beating a drum. The "vigil-
meal" consists of the remains of the principal meal warmed
up, or of meat fried with butter and articles made of flour,
such as are at other times prepared for breakfast. Two hours
after the boom of the cannon is again heard, the fast has to
796 begin and along with it the same routine. Such is the
[285] sacred month of Ramadan, the great month of fasting and
[202] also of feasting, for which the women during the following
[533] month sing songs of regret as if for a loved one departed.

THE GREAT AND THE LITTLE FEAST.

796 In the three following days of the next month, Shauâl, the
"Little Feast," the "Little Bairam" of the Turks, is cele-
[262] brated. It begins, as every day does, in the evening. The
women have made ready bread and butter and sugar-cakes,
the men dress themselves in their best, and the barbers
are occupied till late at night in attending to their cus-
[202] tomers. On this evening three cannon shots proclaim that
[785] the fast has now come to an end. After supper every-
body goes early to bed, but before sunrise all the men are in
the mosque offering up their feast-day prayers, and listening
to the feast-day sermon, which does not last much longer